MTSS Individualized Problem Solving

Sociocultural Partnering Interview and Interpreter Tips

**Directions:** This is a semi-structured interview for families and schools to share information about cultural context and cultural experiences that can impact a student’s schooling. Families learn more about their student’s classroom and the school culture and the school learns more about a family’s cultural experiences and background. When a student and his/her family are identified as refugees or immigrants, knowledge of the circumstances leading up to that identification is very important to understand educational needs and resources thereby providing essential data for intervention development.

This interview should be viewed as two-way communication where the family and school are encouraged to share information and ask questions that will ensure a student’s school success. Broad, open-ended questions and targeted follow-up areas are addressed as appropriate. It is suggested that the interview be conducted by a school mental health professional, teaming with an interpreter/cultural liaison. For non-English speakers, it is important to work initially with the interpreter so they understand and can explain the rationale for this type of interview and the desire of the school to partner with the family.

* Refugee: A person who is unable or unwilling to return to his/her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution.
* Immigrant: A person who voluntarily comes to a new country.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Family Members Interviewed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Interpreter: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School Staff: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions to the Family:**

“We are here to learn more about you and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (student) and to also let you learn more about our school. We believe children will do better in school when families and schools work together (*i.e., use words synonymous with partnership here).* If we all share our wishes, desires, and hopes for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (student) we will better understand how to help \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ succeed. We would like to know more about you and your family but please only respond to questions that are comfortable for you. We also want to be sure that you have a chance to ask us any questions about our school or \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s (student) classroom or class work.

*(i.e., it is very important to take time to be sure that the family understands the purpose of the interview and their choice about answering. They need to know this information is voluntary and will not lead to any harm. It is important to be clear about reporting responsibility as far as danger to self or others, including child abuse. Begin with open–ended questions and follow-up on areas as appropriate. The questions below are written for families but can be reframed to use with students.)*

**Cultural Context**

* “Please help us to know more about (family’s country of origin).”
* “What was your favorite thing about the country you left?”
* “What things and people do you miss?”

Possible Follow-Up Areas:

* Significant things/customs from home country that they cherished and miss
* Customs or other things they have held onto & one they are not able to observe
* Connections for student/family with local cultural/religious affiliation
* Support of other extended family members
* Other

Summary/Notes/Comments:

**Cultural Circumstances**

* “Please help us to know more about how you and your family came to the US.”
* “What was it like for you and your family to leave?”
* “What happened once you (had to/decided to) leave?”

Possible Follow-Up Areas:

* Refugees/immigrants or sons/daughters of refugees/immigrants
* Number of moves
* Family members left behind
* Loss of significant family members
* Travel to this new country (traumatic experience?)
* Other traumatic events…assault, imprisonment, political prosecution etc.?
* Other

Summary/Notes/Comments:

**Current Family Context**

* “Please tell us about your family.”
* “Where is the birthplace of (student and other family members)?”
* “What was the birth of (student) like?”

Possible Follow-Up Areas:

* Family size and constellation
* Language(s) spoken in the home
* Birthplace and birth of student and siblings
* Development and medical history of student and other family members
* Sibling and parent relationships
* History of mental illness, developmental disabilities (be sure to explain this since this term is not familiar to many other cultures)

Summary/Notes/Comments:

**Family Adjustment**

* “What has been most difficult thing for you and your family about being here?”
* “What has been the easiest and best thing for your family about being here?”
* “How are schools and education different here from that in your home country?

Possible Follow-Up Areas**:**

* Student/family acculturation
* Family supports/connection/involvement with community
* Parent/family employment
* Accessibility and ease of transportation
* Involvement with the law
* How time is observed in home culture
* Acceptance of western education
* Acceptance of western medicine, mental health, and other support

Summary/Notes/Comments:

**School History and Student Adjustment**

“Tell me about your child’s past schooling or schools.” (Recognize that for many there may not have been traditional places or opportunities for schooling).

“What were teachers like in the past?”

“Where did (student) attend school?”

“What things do you or (student name) like and dislike about school here?”

“How does (student name) get along with others – is this the same/different from before?”

“What concerns, if any, do you have about (student name)?”

Possible Follow-Up Areas:

* School experiences in past - type of schools attended…rural, urban
* Teachers’ prior role in partnering with student and parents
* Attendance in past - regular or irregular
* Transitions in past- feelings and adjustment
* Special education/other services -therapies, medication, tutoring, counseling….
* Peer relationships
* Discipline expectations
* Homework and teacher relationships

Summary/Notes/Comments

**Student Strengths and Educational Expectations**

“Tell us more about (student name) – what he/she is good at, what are you proud of?”

“What does (student name) like to do?"

“What are your hopes and dreams for the future for (student name)?”

Possible Follow-Up Areas:

* Strengths of student.
* Personality, behaviors, coping style, independence, self-advocacy skills
* General health, developmental milestones, prior hospitalizations
* Access to television and computer time
* Peer relationships - younger, older, stability, positive, negative
* Any concerns about prior danger - suicidal thinking, self-harm etc.
* Outside/extracurricular activities - clubs, sports, volunteering
* Student responsibilities at home
* Family rules and discipline

Summary/Notes/Comment

**Solicit Family Input & Increase Confidence in Partnering**

“I am sure there are many things you want to know about our school. We want you to know it is important for us to find ways that will make it easy to communicate. We want you to get answers and information that will let you feel more comfortable with your child’s education here.”

“What would you like to know more about regarding our school or your child’s classroom or class work?”

“What would make it easier for you to get the information you need to help (student name)?”

“What is the best way for us to communicate?”

“How often would you like to get together to talk about (student’s name)’s progress?”

“What did I not ask you about that would be good for me to know about you and your student?”

Summary/Notes/Comments:

Recommendations/Suggestions/Plans/Next Steps:

Family Contact Information:

**Interpreter Tips**

These suggestions and ideas can make the interpretation/translation process more successful in partnering interviews.

**Environment**

* Make sure all participants feel comfortable.
* Limit, if possible, the conference to the smallest number of people.
* Seating arrangements are critical – let family members choose where to sit if possible.
* Arrange seating so that all participants can maintain eye contact with each other.
* Be sure the interpreter never blocks the family from others.
* Be sure all professionals address the family directly not the interpreter.
* Introductions are very important - give names and the role and position of each person present in relationship to the child.

**Timing**

* Give families a time reference for the meeting.
* Be sure there is enough time since interpretation requires extra time.
* Share ideas for how and who will keep time during the meeting.

**Listening**

* Maintain a responsive posture that indicates full attention to each speaker.
* Remember that body language can cue acceptance and openness to questions.
* If recording – explain what will be recorded and how the information will be used.

**Values/Attitudes**

* Be aware of attitudes that are displayed since these can set the tone of the conference.
* Be sensitive to individual differences across all ethnic groups and avoid stereotyping.
* Be aware of language and tribal differences within ethnic groups.
* Assume the family members understand more than they acknowledge.

**Authority**

* The interpreter should not “editorialize” any comments made by school personnel or family members.
* Remember to remain neutral.
* The goal is to get all participants to feel understood and to form a united team.

**Closing remarks**

* The school professional in charge should make the closing remarks and summarize.
* Be sure time is taken to elicit final questions and to discuss a follow-up plan.
* Thank everyone for his/her input.
* Reassure the family members that the information they shared was very helpful and welcomed.

Adapted from Cherry Creek Schools, 2007.